

MONONGAHELA CONNECTING RAILROAD COMPANY

Between Hazelwood and Soho on the north side of
the Monongahela River and from 18th Street to
34th Street on the south side

Pittsburgh
Allegheny County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-277

HAER
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

National Park Service
Northeast Region
U.S. Custom House
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
MONONGAHELA CONNECTING RAILROAD COMPANY

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Location: Between Hazelwood and Soho on the north side of the Monongahela River and from 18th Street to 34th Street on the south side, Pittsburgh, Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. USGS, Pittsburgh East Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates 17.588150.4475609

Date of Construction: Chartered by the Interstate Commerce Commission as a Common Carrier in March, 1885. Railroads quartered in the J&L Steel Company buildings until early 1900's.

Engineer: Engineering Departments of J&L Steel and The Monongahela Connecting Railroad Company.

Present Owner: LTV Steel Corporation

Significance: Provided for transportation of inbound raw materials, in-plant service for the production of steel, and the outbound shipment of semi-finished steel products to connecting carriers, for the Pittsburgh Works of Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation (now LTV Steel)

Project Information: LTV Steel has demolished all of its steel producing facilities in Pittsburgh Works except for coke production on the north side of the river. As a result, the Mon Con has filed for and received approval from the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon its total operation on the south side of the Monongahela River. The Hot Metal Bridge has been out of service since 1979, the Y Trestle has not been used since May 1993, and the Main Bridge will cease being used for railroad purposes by the end of August, 1993.

Richard L. McCombs
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The Monongahela Connecting Railroad Company filed for abandonment of a portion of its line in 1992. The abandonment was approved in late 1992 conditioned upon the fact that the railroad furnish historical data relative to three railroad owned bridges which would be part of the abandoned facilities. Following is a brief history of The Monongahela Connecting Railroad and the impact these three bridges have had on the railroad's operations.

The Monongahela Connecting Railroad Company (Mon Con) was chartered with Interstate Commerce Commission as a common carrier on March 15, 1885. It was a subsidiary of Jones & Laughlins, Ltd., then Jones & Laughlin Steel Corporation, which was later taken over by LTV Steel Company, the current owner.

James Laughlin acquired property on the north bank of the Monongahela River in 1859 and erected two of the famous Eliza blast furnaces on this site. In 1853, B. F. Jones had begun a steel rolling mill called the American Iron Works on a site on the south bank of the Monongahela River opposite the location that would become Laughlins blast furnaces. In 1861, the two plants were merged into one and became Jones & Laughlins. A river ferry connected the blast furnaces with the south side mills. The steel mills flourished and it can only be assumed that J&L management saw the need to avail themselves of rail transportation to handle inbound raw materials and outbound semifinished steel products. Up to that time, most of the steel mills in the Monongahela River depended on river barges to handle their raw materials and finished product. At the same time, the steel mills were expanding, so were the rail lines in the Pittsburgh district, and so it followed that J&L built its own rail line. The Mon Con was chartered in 1885, and lines were built on both sides of the river, however, the only connection between the two plants was the car ferry, a very inefficient means of moving intra-mill material. The Mon Con built a single track bridge which was put in service during the year 1887. Minutes of a Board meeting of February 26, 1902 indicate that it would cost too much to strengthen the existing bridge; the Mon Con was authorized to prepare plans for a new double track bridge to replace the old bridge. The "Y" Trestle was built in 1898 and the Hot Metal Bridge was constructed in 1901.

The three bridges played a very important part in the successful operations at J&L's Pittsburgh Works. The Main Bridge connected the two parts of the plant which were separated by the Monongahela River, thus permitting the discontinuance of the river ferry -- a very expensive and time consuming way of moving intra-mill freight. The Hot Metal Bridge permitted the transfer of hot iron from the Blast Furnaces on the North Side to the Open Hearth's on the South Side of the Monongahela River. The "Y" Trestle was constructed to provide access to and from the former Pittsburgh and Lake Erie Railroad Company.

J&L prospered and by the late 1930's had become a fully integrated steel mill. The last major expansion by J&L (and the Mon Con) began in 1950 when a new Open Hearth Furnace Shop with 11 furnaces was constructed. In the period from 1950 to 1955 J&L added new a Blooming Mill, new Bar Mills and increased their coke production facilities.

During this same time period, the Mon Con likewise expanded its facilities. New classification yards were built at 25th Street, the "Farm", and Eastern Yards, electric interlocking plants were installed at 25th Street Yard, 29th Street, Elba Junction and the Eastern Yard, and a Hump Yard was installed at the Eastern. The Mon Con had expanded to approximately 50 miles of track owned, another 35 miles used and maintained belonging to J&L. There were approximately 750 employees at this time, with 75 crews working per day. All this crammed into a steel mill approximately two miles long on either side of the Monongahela River and approximately three miles from the downtown section of Pittsburgh.

The steel business began a decline in '70's, and likewise the fortunes of the Mon Con. J&L constructed an electric furnace shop in 1979, installing two of the second biggest electric furnaces in the United States capable of producing 250 plus tons of steel every three hours. At the same time, the blast furnaces were idled and scrapped, the 11 furnace open hearth shop was taken out of service, and shortly after the Strip Mill was closed and sold.

J&L was purchased by LTV Corporation, merged with Youngstown Sheet and Tube and later with Republic Steel. The major production facilities were in Cleveland. Pittsburgh Works was dismantled, and today the only remaining functioning part of the mill is the Coke Plant and the former Galvanizing Plant, which was sold to Metaltech. The last remaining vestige of the South Side steel making facilities which began in 1857 is a Boiler House. The demolition of the electric furnaces will be complete by mid-summer, the Mon Con's tracks will all be removed by late summer leaving the Boiler House to witness to the once proud steel plant and railroad that operated there.

The Mon Con had interchange capabilities with three major railroads. The Pennsylvania Railroad has become Conrail -- the Mon Con's connection to Conrail was severed June, 1993. The Pittsburgh and Lake Erie is now Three Rivers Railway -- that connection will disappear by May 1. The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad is now Chessie and this connection will remain. Presently, the Mon Con ships approximately 70 cars of coke per day to LTV's plants in Cleveland and Chicago, providing approximately 1.6 million revenue tons annually. Forty years ago, during 1953, Mon Con handled 19.2 million revenue tons. The Mon Con now operates two crews per day, seven days per week.

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The Mon Con has obtained approval from the Interstate Commerce Commission to abandon its operation on the South Side. As a result, all the South Side trackage will be removed, and the three bridges will be taken out of service. The "Y" Trestle will be demolished as there is no further need for an interchange connection to the former P&LE Railroad. The Hot Metal Bridge still stands, however, the open hearth buildings to which it was connected have been demolished and it ends at the south river bank. The need to keep the Main Bridge in service as a railroad bridge will end once all the demolition scrap has been removed from South Side -- probably by the end of August. At that time, the Main Bridge and Hot Metal Bridge will be sold to LTV Steel and become utility bridges, carrying approximately 20 utility lines (gas - water - steam - electric) between the Boiler House on the South Side and the Coke Plant on the North Side. There has been some discussion between LTV and City of Pittsburgh officials about converting the two bridges to limited access highway use; however, that decision has not yet been finalized. Thus, in a little over 100 years, the Mon Con has come full circle, the railroad connection between the north and south side of the Monongahela River will cease to exist, the steel plant will disappear and the land will revert back to its pre-steel plant use -- residences and light commercial.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

There is no correspondence or files dealing specifically with this complex. Most of the information referred to in the summary is from the original minute books from Board of Director Meetings, Volumes 1, 2, and 3. These minutes books are in the railroad vault in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.